

## FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

**Meeting Date:** August 25, 2015

**Agenda Item:** 2015 Late Season Waterfowl Seasons/Closures

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time for this Presentation:** 15 minutes

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### Background

For ducks, geese, swans, and coots, Montana is in both the Central and Pacific flyways and follows U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service frameworks based on: winter and breeding population status for geese and May population and habitat surveys for ducks. The proposed seasons are for the maximum number of hunting days allowed by the USFWS. To stay within the limit for the total number of days, yet allow for late-season hunting in December and January, both flyways have short closures within the seasons thus creating “split” seasons. Also, the two hunting zones within the Central Flyway are different for ducks and geese. FWP would like to make them the same, but by USFWS rules FWP cannot change the duck zones to match the goose zones until 2016. As a result of comments, FWP added a proposal for the tundra swan season in the Central Flyway to not have the current two zones and season split. Allowing for changing start and end dates consistent with calendar rotation (opening date Oct 3), FWP proposes no changes from the 2014 season other than the few exceptions noted below:

- Closure period for Central Flyway – Zone 2 for ducks, coots and tundra swans AND South Zone for geese: Change the closed period to Oct. 12–23 to allow waterfowl hunting during a significant migration period for ducks and tundra swans in late October. The proposed closed period is a week earlier than in 2014. Last year, the closed period was such so that big game hunters would not have to choose between the opening of big game season and waterfowl hunting. However, those closed dates miss some very good waterfowl hunting opportunities for those wishing to do so. FWP is proposing an earlier closed period this year.
- Central Flyway – Bonus Teal Season: Change the “bonus teal” season to the first nine days of the regular duck season (Oct. 3–11). Because the proposed closed period referred to above would be a week earlier, the “bonus teal” season would need to be shortened to the first nine days instead of the first 16 days of the regular duck season. Last year, there were very few “bonus teal” taken, so this isn't viewed as a significant loss of opportunity.
- Canvasback bag limit: Increase the canvasback bag limit to 2 as allowed by the USFWS.
- Tundra Swan Zones and Season Split: Eliminate the two different zones and the season split for tundra swan in the Central Flyway. This simplifies regulations, offers opportunity when swans are present during what used to be the season split in Zone 2, and lessens chances of taking a trumpeter which is greater late in the year. The tundra swan season would run 93 days from Oct 3 to Jan 7.
- Elimination of the Milltown Reservoir goose hunting closure in Missoula County, Pacific Flyway.

### Public Involvement Process & Results

The public comment period ran from Aug. 6<sup>th</sup> through Aug. 21.

### Alternatives and Analysis

No alternatives were considered.

### Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission approve the proposed 2015 late season migratory bird regulations.

### Proposed Motion

I move the Commission adopt the proposed 2015 late season migratory bird regulations as presented by FWP.